



Contact:
Suzanne M. Pate
(425)339-8704
spate@shd.snohomish.wa.gov

NEWS RELEASE

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West Nile Virus detected in Snohomish bird Health District reports first infected bird found in western Washington

SNOHOMISH COUNTY, WA --- A dead crow found in Snohomish County has tested positive for West Nile Virus (WNV), according to local health officials. The bird was collected near the town of Snohomish and brought to Snohomish Health District Oct. 7. Birds are sent for virus testing to the USGS National Wildlife Center Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin.

Crows, jays and ravens are among the first birds to become infected and die of the virus. The Health District has submitted a total of nine birds to the Wisconsin lab for testing since mid-April. Statewide, about 160 birds have been collected and tested through the Washington Department of Health WNV surveillance program.

"The chance of human infection is very low --- less than one percent of people who are bitten by an infected mosquito will become severely ill," said M. Ward Hinds, MD, MPH, head of the county's health department. "We knew that West Nile Virus would arrive in western Washington, it was only a matter of when," he said.

This is the second detection of the mosquito-borne virus in a bird collected in Washington state. The first was in a raven found dead near Newport in eastern Washington in mid-September. To date, two human cases of viral infection have been reported in Washington. Both people acquired the infection in other states, and neither individual developed a serious illness.

"Fortunately the risk of mosquito bites drops when the first frost arrives," said Dr. Hinds. He said the health district already is planning surveillance activities for next spring's mosquito season. The plan includes a strong educational message to county residents about ways to protect themselves against mosquito bites.

Recommended precautions include using DEET mosquito repellents, and getting rid of old tires and other containers where mosquitoes could lay eggs in accumulated water.

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Sample News Release

“We really appreciate the public response in helping us watch for West Nile,” said Randal Darst, director of the Health District’s surveillance program. “Mosquitoes transmit the virus, birds don’t. You shouldn’t worry about having a dead crow in your backyard. No West Nile Virus infections in the general public have been associated with handling birds.”

To report a dead bird or for information about WNV, call the health district’s message line at 425.339.8720. Callers need to leave their name and phone number, the date and location the bird was found, and a description of the bird.

About Public Snohomish Health District

Established in 1959, the Snohomish Health District is always working for a safer and healthier community through disease prevention, health promotion, and protection from environmental threats. Find more information about the Health District at www.snohd.org.

About the public health network in Washington

Public health agencies in Washington provide critical programs and services for all people in the state—from drinking water protection to disease prevention. The public health network coordinates at the local, statewide and national level to keep our communities healthy and safe. The work of public health includes:

- **Essential programs for improving health:** Programs such as immunizations, communicable disease prevention, and chronic disease and injury prevention help individuals and communities stay healthy.
- **Information that works:** Resources such as educational and training programs, community health reports and statewide health and safety information provide individuals and communities information they can use to make good decisions.
- **Protecting you and your family every day:** Services such as drinking water and air quality monitoring, septic system inspections, restaurant inspections, disease prevention and planned community crisis response ensure individual and community health and safety.

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